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Is Skolnick crying wolf?

By Tom Fitzpatrick

I went out to Sherman Skolnick's home at 9800 S. Oglesby Tuesday hoping to learn something about his mysterious disappearance.

I should have known this was going to be a mistake. There was no one home. And the people from his investigative staff in the organization called "The Citizens' Committee to Clean Up the Courts" were already on their way down to the Loop and their press conference in the lobby of the Civic Center.

But the drive out south and back gave me a chance to think about Sherman. Right in front, I have to admit, I have doubts about it all. Sherman has placed himself in the position of being a man who has cried wolf too many times.

All Sherman has been drawing with his charges in the last year or so have been yawns and suppressed smiles. Although I think Sherman is irrational at times, I don't thinks he lacks perception. He has noticed that even his wildest charges against judges and officeholders recently have not held the power to shock.

This lack of reaction may have had an escalating effect on his investigations. So at the time he disappeared Monday morning, we have Sherman boasting of having uncovered possibly 10 plots by leading overnment officials. For example:

THE MIDWAY PLANE CRASH of last Dec. 8 was an act of sabotage. The reason for it was to kill four people on the plane. The first two were Mrs. E. Howard Hunt, wife of the CIA man in the Watergate case and Michelle Clark, a CBS correspondent who reportedly found Mrs. Hunt was coming to Chicago to divorce her husband and reveal details of the Watergate incident.

The second two were employes of the Northern Natural Gas Co. of Omaha who reportedly possess information that former Atty. Gen. John N. Mitchell held stock in the El Paso Natural Gas Co. received after he dropped anti-trust charges against the company.

While Sherman was busily engaged in his investigations, he also had time, one night, to charge onto a television station set in his wheel chair to accuse Rennie Davis once again of being a member of the CIA. During the Republican convention, Sherman chased Abbie Hoffman down the street to accuse him of being a government spy as well.

As a culmination to these charges being hurled in all directions, Sherman, according to his associates, left his home at 8:15 a.m. Monday.

"I'm bringing the file on John Mitchell with me," Sherman told Leland Cole.

"If you don't hear from me by 9 a.m., call the police."

Sherman has not been heard from since.

THAT LEAVES US with a serious question. Did someone do Sherman in? Or did Sherman disappear to gain attention for his crusades?

Edwin Black, a free lance writer, claims to have had a long conversation with both Skolnick and Skolnick's top aide, David Hoffman.

"They both deeply believed that the transformation of the United States into another Nazi Germany was only weeks away," Black says. "They felt that something must be done about getting publicity for this view which no one else seemed to believe.

"Sherman urged everyone to call their friends in the media, to write letters, to picket, put signs on the Outer Drive . . . and to do anything they could to alert the public."

At the press conference, Cole, who is 23 years old and says he has been helping Skolnick in his investigations for more than 2 years, was the only speaker.

"YOU CAN BELIEVE WHAT you want," Cole said, "but do you think Sherman Skolnick would throw away 12 years of investigative reporting and pull a stunt that would destroy his credibility completely?"

Cole says Skolnick left the house on crutches. His wheelchair was in the back seat of the new red Ford Pinto Skolnick purchased in the last month because he believed replacement parts for Volkswagens would no longer be available in the near future.

"We have a man with crutches and his driver, who has one arm and uses a hook on the other," Cole said. "They are driving in a red car that doesn't even have license plates because the application hasn't been completed.

"Don't you think somebody should have spotted them by now if they were all right?"

There is no way to write about Sherman Skolnick without making him appear eccentric. As a matter of fact, he is eccentric and if that's libel, Sherman can sue me.

I just hope he is around to file the suit.

SHERMAN SKOLNICK: Missing gadfly's parting words were, "I'm bringing the file on John Mitchell. . . . If you don't hear from me by 9 a.m., call the police."